

## TEACHING ELT COURSE MATERIALS AT TERTIARY LEVEL: SUITABILITY AND CHALLENGES

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### บทคัดย่อ

เมื่อเร็วๆ นี้ นักศึกษาจำนวนมากได้ลงเรียนวิชาที่เกี่ยวข้องกับการทำงานในมหาวิทยาลัยเอกชนหลายแห่งในบังกลาเทศ และนักศึกษาจำเป็นต้องลงเรียนวิชาภาษาอังกฤษและการสื่อสารพื้นฐานในช่วงเริ่มต้นเปิดภาคการศึกษา แม้ว่าหลังจากเรียนแล้ว การสอบถามเพื่อตรวจสอบหาความจริงเกี่ยวกับมาตรฐานภาษาอังกฤษของนักศึกษามหาวิทยาลัยเอกชนกลับเป็นเรื่องที่แตกต่างออกไป ผู้มีหน้าที่เกี่ยวข้องของในมหาวิทยาลัยพยายามอย่างยิ่งที่จะแก้ปัญหา และได้พยายามหาวิธีการใหม่ ๆ ในการแก้ปัญหา หนึ่งในวิธีการเหล่านั้นคือการออกแบบบทเรียน ถึงแม้ว่าหนังสือและบทเรียนสำหรับการสอนภาษาอังกฤษจะมีอยู่มากมายในตลาดโดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งในช่วงโลกาภิวัตน์ในบังกลาเทศ การศึกษาค้นคว้าครั้งนี้เป็นการศึกษาวิจัยมหาวิทยาลัยเอกชนแห่งหนึ่งในบังกลาเทศและแสดงให้เห็นว่าหนังสือชื่อ “Complied English Course Book” ที่ได้นำมาใช้ในสถาบันภาษาอังกฤษที่มีจุดเน้นที่ทักษะทางภาษาทั้ง 4 ด้าน ตามด้วยการเน้นแบบฝึกหัดโดยการใช้วิธีนี้การสื่อสารได้พิสูจน์ให้เห็นว่าประสบความสำเร็จเป็นอย่างมาก

### Abstract

Recently, students are flocking in a big number for job-oriented courses in different private universities in Bangladesh, and they need to take Basic English and Communicative courses in the very beginning of the semesters. Even after taking these courses, the reality-check investigation of the standard of English of the students of different private universities tells a different story. The university authority concerned grapples with this problem, and has taken steps to address the new realities; one of them is the design of course materials even though ELT course books and materials are in rampant in the market with the time of globalization in Bangladesh. The present study takes a research-study of a private university in Bangladesh, and demonstrates that a book entitled as “Complied English Course Book” brought to the English Language Institute with concentrated focus on four language skills, following exercise-based stress, through communicate approach proves to be successful in a greater way.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Globalization and revolution of technological advancement demand a good working knowledge of English among Bangladeshis for participating in the global communication process. The whole scenario requires a paradigm shift from traditional language teaching practices for university students. Bangladeshi students at the tertiary level need to develop learner autonomy and the skills to use authentic language texts in a cooperative learning context so that they can develop the intellectual and social skills to use English as an authentic global language among other language speakers at home and abroad.

At the tertiary level in Bangladesh, many students, mostly at private universities, face enormous difficulties while tackling English courses at the beginning of the semester. The majority of the students have come from a traditional examination-driven education background where the students are made to learn English grammar by heart. English teachers are admired for their ability to explain grammar rules by imparting their knowledge in English though the government has introduced communicative teaching English at the college level (11-12 class level). When the students leave their schools and colleges and come into universities for higher studies, they face the difficulty of understanding the texts written in English as they are much pampered by spoon-fed rules, some of which are obsolete. In general, the students of English have been 'indoctrinated' to the point that unless a certain usage is clearly explained at the tertiary level, they subconsciously reject it.

There exists a lot of English Language

Teaching (ELT) materials in the market, and the majority of them rampantly found in the market are from western world. The availability and the usefulness of the above mentioned ELT materials are well appreciated among ELT scholars and teachers. The materials have been mostly used in ELT classes at the majority of the private universities. The number of private universities in Bangladesh is more than fifty, so a large number of students are getting acquainted with ELT course materials in the very beginning of their university life. In spite of every attempt on the part of these private universities to improve the standard of English of the students, the end-result does not show a promising scenario. The use of prescribed ELT textbooks available in the market is increasing in ELT classrooms; on the other hand, the graph of improving English skills of the students is falling flat. Therefore, this paper deals with ELT-related textbook of a private university in Bangladesh, and demonstrates that a book entitled "Complied English Course Book" brought to the English Language Institute with concentrated focus on four language skills, following exercise-based stress, through communicate approach proves to be successful in a greater way.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Teachers are often faced with the task of choosing what teaching materials to use. Cunningsworth (1995) and Ellis (1997) have mentioned that there are three types of material evaluation. They indicate that the most common form is probably the 'predictive' or 'pre-use' evaluation of the mate-

rials available to them in order to determine which are best suited to the purposes of the teachers. The other types of textbook evaluation are the 'in-use' evaluation designed to examine material that is currently being used and the 'retrospective' or 'post-use' (reflective) evaluation of a textbook that has been used in any institution. In other words, teachers may feel the need to undertake a further evaluation to determine whether the materials have 'worked' for them once they have used the materials.

A brief review of the literature connected with materials evaluation showcases that the focus of attention has been till to date more or less on predictive evaluation. Teachers carry out their own predictive evaluations. There are quite large number of checklists and guidelines available to help the teachers to do so (e.g. Cunnigsworth, 1984, Breen and Candlin, 1987, Skierso, 1991, McDonough and Shaw 1993). Breen and Candlin (1987), for example, organize the questions in their checklists into two phases, the first of which enables the teachers to address the overall "usefulness" of the materials; on the other hand, the second caters for 'a more searching analysis' based on the teacher's actual teaching situation. The idea behind these guides is to help teachers carry out a predictive evaluation systematically. There remain many limits to show how "scientific" such an evaluation can be as Sheldon (1988:245) mentions, "it is clear that course book assessment is fundamentally a subjective, rule-of thumb activity, and that no neat formula, grid or system will ever provide a definite yardstick". Sheldon (1988) has offered several reasons for textbook evaluation. He suggests that the selection of an ELT textbook often pro-

vides an important administrative and educational decision in which there is considerable professional, financial, or even political investment. Although Sheldon (1988) mentions that no general list of criteria can ever really be applied to all teaching and learning contexts without considerable modification, most of these standardized evaluation checklists contain similar components that can be used as helpful starting points for ELT practitioners in a wide variety of situations. Prominent theorists in the field of ELT textbooks design and analysis, such as, Williams (1983), Sheldon (1988), Brown (1995), Cunnigsworth (1995), and Harmer (1996) all agree, for instance, that evaluation checklists should have some criteria relating to the physical characteristics of textbooks, such as, layout, organizational and logistical characteristics.

Retrospective evaluation takes on special importance concerning the need to evaluate materials retrospectively. This evaluation can provide the teacher with information which can be used to determine whether it is worthwhile it is worthwhile using the materials again, which activities again 'work' and which do not, and how to modify the materials to make them more effective for further use. A retrospective evaluation also serves as a means of 'testing' the validity of a predictive evaluation, and may point to ways in which the predictive instruments can be improved for further use.

Most of the teachers perform a retrospective evaluation impressionistically or they can attempt to collect information in a more systematic manner, that is, conduct an empirical evaluation. We can presumably say truly that most teachers do carry out impressionistic evaluation of their teaching

materials. That is, during the course they assess whether particular activities ‘work’ (usually with reference to the enthusiasm and degree of involvement manifested by the students) while at the end of the course they make summative judgments of the materials. Empirical evaluations are perhaps less common as they are time-consuming; however, teachers report using students’ journals and end-of-course questionnaires to judge the effectiveness of their teaching, including the materials they used. One way in which an empirical evaluation can be made more manageable is through micro-evaluation. In a micro-evaluation, however, the teacher selects one particular teaching task in which she/he has a special interest, and submits this to a detailed empirical evaluation. A micro-evaluation calls for an overall assessment of whether an entire set of materials has worked. A micro-evaluation can also stand by itself and can serve as a practical and legitimate way of conducting an empirical evaluation of teaching materials.

Evaluating materials is a complex process. First, it demands that we establish their relative merits from among a wide range of feature (Cunningsworth, 1984, Rea-Dickins and Germaine, 1992, McDonough and Shaw, 1993). Pedagogical factors need to be considered, and this includes suitability for the age group, cultural appropriateness, methodology, level quality, number and types of exercises, skills, teacher’s book, variety, pace, personal involvement, and problem solving. Second, we have to bear in mind not only construct validity or ‘the extent to which a reviewer thinks that a book will or will not be useful to a specified audience’ (Rea-Dickins 1994:82), but also the materials already in use.

There are numerous ways of reaching a decision about a new course book. Algie (1976) suggests at least six. At one extreme it is possible to rely on instinct, or, as we should call it, our “professional judgments and expertise”. Using professional judgment is important and necessary, and, in the end, all methods, no matter how constructed, are based on judgment. However, to work intuitively has its drawbacks. Intuition is not explicit. Often it is difficult to explain to others; as a result, difficult to defend.

Selection regarding materials is often based on either administrative convenience or teacher intuition (Spratt 1999) rather than on a principled analysis of the needs of the teaching/ learning situation. And yet, as Vincent observes, ‘...we need to find topics and tasks that will engage learners physically, emotionally, socially and intellectually in learning the new language’ (1984:40). If this is the case, then logic suggests that we first of all need to discover far more about our learners than we might assume we already know and to set about actively involving them in decisions regarding the materials, content and tasks that are selected or designed for them. Class-specific questionnaires elicit learners’ views on in-class materials that later, following teacher mediation (Spratt 1999), lead to the formulation of useful criteria for future selection of published materials and design of teacher-made materials for that class or for similar classes.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This particular paper can be classified as the “retrospective” type of evaluation. In

the backdrop of a collection of criteria proposed by various researchers, an attempt is made to check the characteristics of a compiled course book. Under English Language Institute of United International University, there are eight teachers in English. We as a team put our head together to discuss about the topics to be taught for the Basic English, and we reached a consensus about the topics. Our suggested topics are jotted down, and suggestions of topics related materials are put forward. After collecting all the suggested-related materials, we sit down for indexing the materials in order. After that, we compile the whole materials into a book format named as Complied English Course Book.

### **Procedure**

We get a publishing house to get these materials into a book form ready for the students. For three consecutive semesters, the students are following the 'Complied English Course Book' for their English course. All the teachers of English are teaching the same course book through out the semesters. In a single semester, more than 500 students take Basic English course in the very beginning of their semesters. Out of these total numbers of students, I have been teaching 210 students in their Basic English course for the last three semesters. I give a

questionnaire administered by the authority to the students to see the evaluation of the students regarding the 'Complied English Course Book' and their overall feedback about the performance of themselves and improvement of their skills of English. The questionnaire has been scaled as 5= Strongly agree, 4 = Agree, 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree, and 1 = Strongly Disagree.

### **DATA ANALYSIS, AND RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Out of the total number of the questionnaire (Total-11), here I present the main and related question regarding the course material. The no 1 question is: The teachers gave the course-outline in the 1st day of the class. The no 2 question is: Materials mentioned in the course-outline are well covered. The no 3 question is: The course was useful and I learned a great deal from the course, and the no 5 question is: The instructor encouraged class participation and responded to questions asked. The no 7 question is: The instructor used class time effectively. The no 11 question is: The instructor always delivers lecture in English in the class.

The table 1 shows that the students of Section D have less positive feedback about

**Table 1: Course Evaluation, Summer 2009 Semester  
BBA Programme**

| <b>Course Title (Section)</b> | <b>Question 3</b> | <b>Question 5</b> | <b>Question 11</b> | <b>Average</b> | <b>No of Std</b> |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|----------------|------------------|
| Basic English (D)             | 4.34              | 4.50              | 4.36               | 4.34           | 22.00            |
| Basic English (L)             | 4.40              | 4.73              | 4.60               | 4.42           | 15.00            |
| Evaluation Criteria           | 3                 | 5                 | 11                 | average        | -                |
| Departmental Average          | 4.25              | 4.27              | 4.07               | 4.31           | -                |

the use of the course book than Section L; therefore, they claim that they have learnt a great deal from the course is confirmed by the data seen in the data (4.40). The greater speaking ability in English (that is, class participation) of the section L than Section D matches positively with the greater listening comprehension of the students of section L than the students of Section D as the students of Section L responded the questions asked (providing feedback) more than the students of Section D.

From the table 2, we can say that the response of all the sections (M, O, T) is very positive than the departmental average. The whole feedback goes in the favour of the positive outlook of the course material. Their speaking ability in English provided in no 5 question (by responding the questions asked) also proves that they have improved in their speaking as the majority of the students were very shy in the speaking English among fellow classmates.

Table no 3 shows that the students of section D has got more positive attitude towards the course book than the students of section F, and the positive attitude towards course book of the students of Section D shows a co-relationship in their speaking, that is, the ability of speaking English of Section D has improved than the students of Section F.

Looking at the three tables, we can say that the overall feedback of more than 200 students about the 'Compiled English Course Book' is very positive. We can say that the same course book can be used for other universities as well for their English course students. The whole study is based on a feedback-type of the students, so I do not dissect the overall materials and its related topics included in the course materials. Still, I will try to focus on some grey areas of the course materials.

At the very beginning of the course, an outline is given to the students to clarify the

**Table 2: Course Evaluation, Spring 2009 Semester  
BBA Programme**

| Course Title (Section) | Question 3 | Question 5 | Question 11 | Average | No of Std |
|------------------------|------------|------------|-------------|---------|-----------|
| Basic English (M)      | 4.58       | 4.63       | 4.79        | 4.69    | 24.00     |
| Basic English (O)      | 4.73       | 4.68       | 5.00        | 4.86    | 22.00     |
| Basic English (T)      | 4.38       | 4.54       | 4.71        | 4.52    | 24.00     |
| Departmental Average   | 4.20       | 4.26       | 4.00        | 4.27    | -         |

**Table 3: Course Evaluation, Fall 2009 Semester  
BBA Programme**

| Course Title (Section) | Question 3 | Question 5 | Question 11 | Average | No of Std |
|------------------------|------------|------------|-------------|---------|-----------|
| Basic English (D)      | 4.43       | 4.48       | 4.61        | 4.43    | 23.00     |
| Basic English (F)      | 4.25       | 4.30       | 4.12        | 4.25    | 16.00     |
| Evaluation Criteria    | 3          | 5          | 11          | average | -         |
| Departmental Average   | 4.21       | 4.25       | 4.02        | 4.24    | -         |

intended objectives of the course, and questions in the questionnaire are given at the end of the course (semester) to seek the objective and unbiased responses to the queries.

For getting good vocabulary and practice, we take selected pages suitable of NTC Vocabulary Builders (purple & Orange books by Fisher Pete of National Text Book Company, Illinois, USA made suitable for the students. The other books are in the following: 1) Intermediate English Grammar by Raymond Murphy, 2) "Oxford Practice Grammar" by John Eastwood, 3) "Sentence Skills" by John Langan, 4) "English Skills with Readings" by John Langan, 5) "English Vocabulary in Use" by Stuart Redman, 6) "Exercises in Reading Comprehension" by E.L. Tibbits, 7) "Complete Course in English" by Robert J. Dixon. From the other books, we are told to pick up many passages for the students to go through and enrich their vocabulary.

We take approaches which are educationally and socially acceptable for teaching to the students of other communities as well. It means that the materials have been sequenced into the linguistic content of the materials according to the structural complexity, starting from less complex structures to more demanding ones.

We have periodic review and test sections at the end of the each one of the lessons. We take class quiz for all the topics covered in the 'Compiled English Course Book'. It is worth mentioning that the tests are comparable and compatible with the format and the testing methods which are employed in the Mid-terms and final exams. We have appropriate visual materials along with 'Compiled English Course Book' to

enhance language learning in classrooms. We show the content of the films whose goal is assumed to help the users promote their language skills and enhance learning processes effectively.

We give interesting topics and tasks included in the 'Compiled English Course Book', and the topics of readings vary from factual to anecdotal ones and sometimes are very funny.

Clear instructions are given in the 'Compiled English Course Book', and they are clear and easy to understand for the learners. Even though the learners are not familiar with the structures and the new words used in the instructions, the models given for each group of exercises provide contextual clues for the learners as to what they are expected to do.

The content of the reading comprehension texts are clearly organized and graded. We also provide plenty of authentic materials which inspire the students to do their tasks appropriately. We have also in the book presentation of the grammatical structures and practices as we believe that grammar drills occupy the lion's share of each lesson and range from repetition, substitution of transformational ones. They are aimed at providing the learners with oral practice of the intended grammatical points. We have language lab for audio sharpening listening their skill, and we give them listening practice from Headway (Intermediate/Pre-Intermediate) English course by John and Liz Soars. We have two/three presentations during the whole semester for improving their skill in speaking. We also try to encourage the students to develop their own learning strategies and to become independent in their learning.

## CONCLUSION

As we have done careful material development and evaluations, and we have systematically evaluated and assessed them on the basis of some established criteria; thus, in the form of task evaluation we are provided with a practical basis for achieving this. The process described here has several advantages over other less structured ways of selecting the material and over other evaluation sheets. First, it is explicit. It makes the decision-makers reflect upon their criteria and then state (and possibly defend) them. Second, having identified criteria, it enables them to be prioritized. Third, it can help in the decision-making process by reducing the 'fuzziness' of the logic. The result and overall feedback of the study goes in the favour of the positive outlook of the 'Compiled English Course Book' material. We also see an improvement of the students in terms of the ability in their speaking as well as in listening comprehension skill.

Looking at these aspects mentioned above, we can conclude that there may be some drawbacks in the study we have undertaken, but it is worthy to mention that the 'Compiled English Course Book' brought to by the English Language Institute proves to be successful for teaching students in a greater way. This 'Compiled English Course Book' seems to have ingredients ELT course books often lack: interesting and motivating topic content, coherent and engaging (reading) texts which stimulate the imagination of the learners. The positive feedbacks of the students suggest that the 'Compiled English Course Book' has stimulating and pedagogically effective materials for the students. This 'Compiled En-

glish Course Book' can be a pathfinder for other teachers who are teaching at private universities in Bangladesh. It may not stay appropriate in the test of time, but it has shown its presence to be successful for ELT Practitioners, like us, and it will be effective for English teachers at home and abroad.

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